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SUBJECT: ANC CULTURE COULD PREVENT BACKLASH

Classified By: Political Counselor Raymond Brown. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) European Commission delegate to South Africa, Andrea Rossi (protect), told PolOff on 18 July that he believes President Mbeki will manage to stay on as ANC President for at least another two years, but more if Mbeki has his wish. Rossi, who attended the entire policy conference, said that Mbeki's supporters managed to employ "the oldest political tricks in the book" to manipulate conference proceedings in their favor. The most brazen trick Rossi witnessed was during the commission on organizational review, which was chaired by NEC member Cyril Ramaphosa and which discussed the "two centers of power" debate. Rossi said that though the sitting delegates were in clear agreement that there should not be two centers of power (i.e. Mbeki should not stay on as ANC President for another 5-year term since his term as State president will end in 2009), Ramaphosa told the delegates that because the commission was running an hour behind, they should break for lunch and come back to make a final decision. According to Rossi, ANC Youth League (ANCYL) delegates protested and pointed out that there was no reason to postpone the decision since it was quite clear where everyone stood. Ramaphosa denied the request and everyone broke for lunch.

12. (C) When Rossi returned an hour later, he said there were clearly more delegates in the room than before lunch, even though delegates were told not to switch commissions. The additional delegates did not go by unnoticed and one ANCYL delegate stood up to sarcastically welcome the newcomers and asked them to share their views. Not surprisingly, the new delegates were not opposed to having two centers of power. Ramaphosa then quickly announced that because there was no longer unanimity in the room, the commission could not produce a recommendation that the ANC President automatically become the State President. Rossi said he was most surprised at the total acceptance of Ramaphosa's decision, even though it was obvious to all that the situation had been stage-managed in Mbeki's favor.

13. (C) In the end, Rossi believes that the culture of the ANC -- to accept decisions as a coherent group, to not rock the boat, and to present a united front to the world -- combined with Mbeki's astute political prowess will open the door for Mbeki for a third term. Rossi also suspects that Mbeki will use the party's reluctance to have two centers of power as a selling point to his opponents by logically arguing that he should stay on another two years as both ANC and State President. In the meantime, Mbeki could use the National Executive Committee (NEC) to change South Africa's Constitution to relax presidential term limits, which would allow Mbeki the excuse that he is again, only acquiescing to the party's wishes. (COMMENT: Perhaps foreshadowing this possibility, the organizational review document lays out

three choices for solving the dilemma: a) ANC President automatically becomes State President; b) place the decision in the hands of the NEC; and c) harmonize the party and national elections. END COMMENT)

14. (C) COMMENT: Rossi's argument that the ANC will present a united front, even at the expense of true democracy, is of compelling interest. Moreover, if the ANCYL is not willing to put up a fight until the bitter end, it is doubtful the average, working class delegate from the province would either. Mbeki clearly managed to stave off any ANC constitutional barrier barring him from running again. He also could overcome the possibility of not being nominated by any province other than Eastern Cape by having strategically placed supporters nominate him from the floor in December as was successfully done during the last ANC conference when Mosioua Lekota managed to secure his position of ANC Chairperson. END COMMENT.  
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